

WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

By RUPERT HUGHES

With Illustrations by James Montgomery Flagg

XI—THE TRAGEDY OF A HONEYMOON

FORBES had not been invited to Persis's wedding. She had debated the matter feverishly and resolved that it was the lesser slight to leave him out of the 2,500 who received the double-enveloped engravings. There was a certain distinction in being omitted, and she knew that he could not account it an oversight. She had been tempted to write him a letter. She scrawled off a dozen and tore them up in turn. What she had to say could be put on paper. Besides, it would be hideously indiscreet.

But Forbes was present in her thoughts. He was the chief wedding guest in her soul. He seemed to kneel between her and the groom and try to shoulder him away. This added a last terror to the multitude of her frights—fright of being in the joyous company and fear that she might kneel on her veil and pull it askew to nameless terrors of the bridegroom.

She had a blurred sense of returning to the carriage and to the house, and of the mob there, the clatter of tongues, the price-mark appraisal of gifts, the swish of green dresses about the buffet, the smirking repetition of the same banalities, the lines of drifting hands, the faces that floated up like melons on a stream and spoke and sometimes kissed her. But what did it matter who kissed her now? They were Willie's cheeks and Willie's lips. She was all Willie's, now and forevermore.

Eventually, when she was white-mouthed with fatigue and eager to swoon out of the pandemonium, some one took pity on her, and she was spirited away to her room and her bridal livery taken from her. The weight of the veil and the train had been greater than she knew. The blossoms were lifted from her head, and in their place a little black straw hat with a fringe of black tulle was pinned. And in place of her white satin a simple Callot gown of sage green cloth was fastened about her girlhood the last time.

She had been swept and spun in a maelstrom, an eternal crash! crash! crash! Then suddenly she was alone in a room with this little man. She heard the thud of the door like a coffin lid. She heard the lock click; she saw him peering at her with a fox-like slyness. He was whispering off his coat and waistcoat and fumbling at his scarf. And his words were in his whispering, close voice:

"Well, that's over. And, thank God, I can get out of this damned collar before it chokes me!"

That was his first comment on their solitude! But it was better than the love speeches he tried to make next. She sank into a chair; but he was wrapping his arms about her. He was trying to say pretty things, and making a complete fiasco. He was kissing her with ownership, and she dared not turn her lips from his, though all her soul was averted.

He was tugging at her hatpins and pulling her hair naggingly. She rose, controlling her impatience, and spoke with a meekness that amazed her:

"Nichtette is there. She will help me."

He grinned peevishly.

"Nichtette, eh? I thought we were to be alone—for once? Well, send her away—as soon as you can."

He spoke already with command, and she said, with that sick meekness:

"All right, Willie."

She shrank away and was afraid to meet the eyes of Nichtette. And even Nichtette went at her ministrations. And then she sent Nichtette away. At the door Nichtette paused to stare through eyes of water, then ran back and clasped Persis and kissed her, and ran out and closed the door.

As Forbes had once surveyed the tide of Fifth avenue from the upper deck of a motor-bus, so now, from a scrying-slip, he watched the thronged traffic along the spacious avenue of the Hudson River and the broad plaza of the City.

Among the tugs, noisy and rowdy as newbies, the waddling ferry boats, the barges loaded with refuse or freight, the passenger boats and excursion boats, and the merchantmen from many ports, a few yachts picked their way superbly, their bowsprit like a trim white flag, like skirts drawn aside.

Among these yachts, though Forbes was unaware of it, was the Isolde, known to those who know such things as a ridiculously luxurious craft, a floating residence. Persis had christened the yacht at Willie's request, and he had accepted the name as a good omen, since he said: "I always have a perfect sleep when Isolde is under way."

Never dreaming that Forbes was on the liner that had gone down the bay a few minutes before, Persis fastened her binocular on the island and tried to pick him out from among the men whom distance rendered illipitani. She selected some vague promenade and sent him her blessings. If he ever received them he never knew whence they came.

Today's Persis on the boat was altogether another woman from yesterday's Persis. The toil and fever of preparation, the bacchanal orgies of purchase, the dressing up, the celebration of the festival—these were the joys of the wedding to her, and she had drained them to the full. They left her exhausted and sated. The anticipation was over, the realization begun.

In some wiser communities the bride and groom separate for a day or two after the ceremony. But Persis had no such breathing-space. Persis was delivered to Willie Enslee in a state of fagged-out nerves, muscles, and brain. To him, however, the weeks of preparation had been a mere annoyance, a postponement, a prelude too long, too ornate. And when at last the prize was his he found the fact almost intolerably beautiful. He possessed Persis Enslee! She had no longer even a name of her own. Miss Cabot had been merged into the Enslee estates.

One does not expect today the childlike innocence that was revealed or pretended by the brides of other years. Nowadays even their mothers "tell them things." And Willie knew that

Persis was neither ignorant nor ingenious. Willie did not expect to initiate an ignominy into any unheeded mysteries. He expected at most a certain modest reluctance and confusion. He was dumfounded to be met with icy horror and shuddering recoil. After the first repulse the terror with which she flung away from his caresses enhanced her the more.

If Persis had married the man she loved, the man whose touch was like a flame, she would still have been terrified; but love would have hallowed the conquest, changed fright into ecstasy, and glorified surrender.

And now it was Enslee that recoiled, strangely smitten with an awe, a reverence for her and her integrity. "You are a saint," he murmured, "an angel, and I am a brute. You are too good, too wonderful!"

Persis was startled at being treated with reverence. It was perhaps the first time she had ever been held sacred. She accepted this tribute in lieu of the others, and they left the hotel as they had entered it, still bachelor and maid, though they wore the same name.

But she was alone upon the ocean now, and she feared her husband more than before. She found him somewhat ridiculous in his uniform, with his yachting cap a trifle topheavy for his slim skull. Yet he was the owner; his flag and his club pennant were fluttering aloft. And Persis felt sure that he had repented of his mercy and was ashamed of his asceticism.

He ogled her as he paced the unstable deck, and found her more beautiful than ever, clad in a trim white suit and curled up in her chair like a purring kitten, the sun sifting over her through the awning like a golden powder. And he knew that she was his.

He paused at her side and mellowed her cheek, pinched the lobe of her ear, and pursed his lips to kiss her red lips. She winced, then frowned, and shook her head.

He grew fiercely petulant, sardonic, ugly. He whined and swore and muttered. And, finally, to that mood she yielded, feeling herself degraded beneath her own contempt.

Mismatched and incompatible in every degree, they glared at each other like sick wretches in the same hospital ward. The next evening as they sat at table in the dining saloon it came over her that for the rest of her days she must see that unbeautiful face opposite her. She felt an impulse to scream, to run to the railing and leap overboard, to thwart that life sentence in any possible way.

She walked to a porthole and stared out at the dark waves shuffling past like stampeding cattle. The moon on the sea spread a pathway of dancing white lights. She wanted to run away, to step forth on that fantastic pavement and follow it out of the world.

It came over Persis with maddening vividness that she had made a ruin of her happiness. All the wealth was nothing but mockery. Even the hats and the multitudes of dresses were wasted splendor, weapons of conquest to be left in an armory.

The night grew more and more wonderful. The moon was like a white face flung back with unappeased desire. The wind across the waves tugged amorously at her hair and whimpered and caressed her. And she was with Willie Enslee, the unlovable, the hideously uninteresting, the intolerable. She was handcuffed to Willie Enslee for life.

The ache of longing that thrilled the night world thrilled Enslee's heart, too; and he crept close to her, his adoration, his wife, the only soul on earth he deeply loved. He set his cheek against hers and clenched her in his arms fiercely. And immediately he encountered that hopeless antipathy, though all she said was a faintly petulant "Don't, please!"

It struck him in the face like a little fist. He moved aloof from her in abject humiliation and thought hard, took out a cigarette, tapped it on the back of his hand, puffed restlessly, threw the cigarette over the rail, and a moment later took out another. There was no need for words. The air throbbed with Persis's detestation of the voyage. The sailing master passed. Willie called to him:

"Swendsen!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Can you make for home?"

"I beg pardon, sir."

"You heard?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The commands were given in the distance, a bell rang remotely in the engine-room, and the stars wheeled across the sky as the yacht came round. The phosphorescent sea revealed the wake they had plowed in a long straight furrow of white fire, and now there was a sharp curve in the line. And shortly they were paralleling its dimming radiance.

They were bound for home. The mere thought of the word brought a tragic chuckle from Enslee's heart. Home was a word he could not hope to use. Home was a thing he must do without.

Persis was sorry for her husband, but just a trifle sorer for Persis. She soiled herself with the thought that it was partly for Willie's own sake that she consented to go back, since she stayed out in that solitude with him any longer she would go mad and jump overboard. And he would not like that in the least. A bride in town would be worth two in the ocean. Besides, a suicide on a honeymoon would be sure to cause a fearful scandal. She could imagine the headlines.

Willie was a darling to yield so easily. It showed her how much he loved her—also how meekly he obeyed her. That is always an important question to settle. Perhaps it is what honey-moons are for—training-stations in which husbands are broken to harness and taught to answer a mere chirrup; it saves the whip.

But the comfort Persis took in finding that her husband was her messenger-boy ended as they came up the bay again. She suddenly realized that for Willie and her to be seen at the polo games, when they had so ostentatiously set out on their honeymoon only two days before, would provoke a landslide of gossip. Everybody on earth

would be at the polo games, and she and Willie could not hope to escape attention. They would be ridiculed to death behind their backs and to their faces. Therefore they must not go.

She explained this to Willie, and he shook his head and broke out, peevishly:

"Why the hell didn't you think of all this in the first place?"

"In the first place, Willie," said Persis, "you are the man of the family, and supposed to do the thinking. In the second place, I won't be sworn at."

"I wasn't swearing at you, my love. I was just swearing. Well, if you don't want to go to the polo games, where in—where do you want to go—up to the country place?"

Here was a problem. She was sure that she did not want to be alone in a country house with Willie. That would be worse than the yacht. Since she could not endure either to be alone with him or to go among crowds with him, the dilemma was perfect. Already there was another incompatibility established.

She and Willie, therefore, sneaked from their yacht to their house in town. They astounded the servants, and there was much scurrying and whisking. Nobody was in town; they would be quite unnoticed. But when nobody is in town the theaters close up. There

was nothing they had not seen or had not been warned against. Willie proposed a roof-garden.

They remembered Ten Eyck's eyes, and said, "Let's make it a London garden." "I'll get what I can tomorrow. You wouldn't like to cross in the yacht?" he asked, laughingly. "Isolde's all right in the ugliest weather."

She shook her head violently, and yawned and spoke so eloquently of her fatigue that he slunk away to his own room.

The next day he set his secretary to work running down a berth on a steamer. Everything seemed to be gone. People whom the panicky times had reduced from wealth to anxiety were crossing the ocean to places where they could economize without ostentation. The final report was that the only suitable berth was the imperial suite on the new Imperator.

"Did you grab it?" said Willie. The secretary shook his head.

"Why the devil didn't you?" Willie snapped.

"They ask \$5,000 for it."

Even Willie winced at this. "I don't want it for a year," he groaned. "Just one voyage."

"It has a private deck, a drawing-room, two bathrooms, two servants' rooms."

The "private deck" decided Willie; but when he told Persis he laid stress on the price he paid; not from any braggart motive, but as a pathetic sort of courtship.

Persis smiled a little. It was something. But when she found the private deck she took pains to invite other passengers she knew to make it their own. Among the passengers were Mrs. Neff and Alice.

After Persis had thwarted Alice's elopement with Stowe Webb the boy had been tempted to go to Mrs. Neff and plead with her to withdraw her ban, seeing that he was now a man of affairs with an assured income. But he imagined what she would say when she asked him the amount of that income; and he imagined her smile. She did not have to ridicule his fortune. The sum itself was so petty that it ridiculed itself.

He and Alice had met clandestinely a few times at the houses of friends, but both were young and both were timid, and their friends were cynical

there now. How'd you like to run across for the Grand Prix, Persis?"

"Paris is a nice place," said Persis, with a mystic veil about her voice.

And now Ten Eyck looked at her. Their eyes met. His were angry, and hers fell before their prophetic fire. She stammered a little as she said:

"I like London better. We could make the Royal Cup at Ascot if we hurried. My sister could take care of us in the country."

But Ten Eyck slapped his knees impatiently, glared at her, and growled: "Bluffer! Good night!"

And he was gone without shaking hands.

"What did he mean by bluffer?" said Enslee. "Doesn't he like your sister?"

"Apparently not," said Persis. "And he used to be crazy about her. She threw him overboard for 'Kelly'."

Willie had arranged for supper at home. As they left the theater and sped through the streets crowded with uncharacteristic mobs Persis thought longingly of the tango-hunts she had indulged in during the past season. But there was no one to dance with her now.

And she realized that she would be impossible as a wife. She was a hunting bride with a husband who abhorred this whole chapter in the chronicle of diversion.

Along with Willie in the Enslee palace, which Ten Eyck described as "a sublime junk-shop," Persis was oppressed by melancholia.

"This town is a cemetery," she exclaimed, as she quenched her eighth cigarette stump. "Opening a house here now is like opening a grave in Woodlawn at midnight. You've got to

take me away or leave me in Bloomington."

"What about Paris?" Willie suggested.

She remembered Ten Eyck's eyes, and said, "Let's make it a London garden." "I'll get what I can tomorrow. You wouldn't like to cross in the yacht?" he asked, laughingly. "Isolde's all right in the ugliest weather."

She shook her head violently, and yawned and spoke so eloquently of her fatigue that he slunk away to his own room.

The next day he set his secretary to work running down a berth on a steamer. Everything seemed to be gone. People whom the panicky times had reduced from wealth to anxiety were crossing the ocean to places where they could economize without ostentation. The final report was that the only suitable berth was the imperial suite on the new Imperator.

"Did you grab it?" said Willie. The secretary shook his head.

"Why the devil didn't you?" Willie snapped.

"They ask \$5,000 for it."

Even Willie winced at this. "I don't want it for a year," he groaned. "Just one voyage."

"It has a private deck, a drawing-room, two bathrooms, two servants' rooms."

The "private deck" decided Willie; but when he told Persis he laid stress on the price he paid; not from any braggart motive, but as a pathetic sort of courtship.

Persis smiled a little. It was something. But when she found the private deck she took pains to invite other passengers she knew to make it their own. Among the passengers were Mrs. Neff and Alice.

After Persis had thwarted Alice's elopement with Stowe Webb the boy had been tempted to go to Mrs. Neff and plead with her to withdraw her ban, seeing that he was now a man of affairs with an assured income. But he imagined what she would say when she asked him the amount of that income; and he imagined her smile. She did not have to ridicule his fortune. The sum itself was so petty that it ridiculed itself.

He and Alice had met clandestinely a few times at the houses of friends, but both were young and both were timid, and their friends were cynical

with discouragement. Alice wanted to go to watch him off at the dock, but had not dared, and only sent him a tear-blotted steamer letter. And while he was down in his stateroom reading it she was locked in her pink-and-white virginial chamber crying her blue eyes crimson on her bed. She never spoke of him to her mother, and Mrs. Neff did not know what had become of him.

Then Mrs. Neff grew just a trifle too shrewd. Noting that Alice never spoke of Stowe Webb, she made up her crafty old mind that the two young wretches were meeting secretly. Since nothing happened at all, she all too cleverly decided that something was about to happen, and resolved to nip the passion-flower in the bud. She read Alice a long curtain-lecture on the perfection with which children obeyed their parents when she was young, then dilated on the advantages of European travel in broadening the mind, and drew such a glowing portrait of her own benevolence in offering Alice the opportunity of going abroad that the girl began to foresee what was coming, and what real motive was actuating her mother. By the time Mrs. Neff arrived at the heartbreaking news that she was about to drag Alice to Paris the simple child was able to dissemble her ecstasy and give a convincing portrayal of a daughter who would rather go anywhere on earth than to France. Like Brer Rabbit, she pleaded not to be thrown into the briar patch of all places. So she was thrown into the briar patch. Alice was on her way to Paris.

She took Persis into her confidence, and Persis found a dreary pleasure in the look. She even forbore to warn Alice against the folly of marrying into poverty. She was not so satisfied with her own triumph as to recommend her example to others.

Persis found London at the height of its June festivity. The President of the United States was in town, and there were state banquets and state balls and state dinners, mingled with private celebrations that rivaled them in pomp and a horse show, and horse races, regimental polo tournaments, the annual hysterical wholesale celebration of nothing in particular.

Paris and London were like two rival circuses bidding for the public, boating, swimming, blowing horns, and sending out band-wagons and parades. While Persis was wearing of the English sideboots, Forbes was tiring of the French. The wounds Persis had inflicted on his heart and his pride were still fresh and bleeding. The fever had not left him. At the thought of her, or the sight of her name, frequently in the daily papers, or her portrait in the illustrated papers, the scarlet shame of his defeat still ran across his brow, still the hunger for her gripped him, rest-sickened him.

Senator Taft had not enjoyed the progress of his conspiracy. For senators he had taken Stowe Webb, who moved about in an immense Hamlet with a beard draped in black. For military attaché he had brought Forbes, whose thoughts flew backward to the past instead of scouting ahead. For acting ambassador he had chosen a daughter who, though torn away from her New York charities, found new miseries to engage her everywhere. Even on the ship she had sought dress in the stable, in the steerage and the second cabin. Instead of holding hands in moonlit nooks and funnel-corners, she was taking up purses, sterilizing milk for sick babies, and selling tickets for a benefit concert.

Forbes admired Mildred profoundly, but he preferred his own sorrows to the woes she discovered in other people. Mildred liked Forbes immensely, in a motherly, elder-sisterly, trained-nurse way. But of love between them there was no visible trace.

Taft grew fonder and fonder of Forbes as a son, but he could not confide him as a son-in-law. The mating of human hearts, he found, was a task beyond diplomacy or politics. He wondered if he would have more success in promoting affection between America and France, the two republics that made each other possible. He wished that he had never undertaken any of his tasks. He felt old, ill, tired. He had agreed to take over the Embassy on the fifth of July. Hardly more than a week remained of his freedom, and that week was the big week of the year—the grande semaine.

He did not know that other dangers lurked in ambush ahead of himself. Mrs. Neff, ignorant of Stowe Webb's office, had come straight to Paris from the Imperial, bound to expose Alice again to the Senator's inspection. More dangerous yet was Winifred Mather. Taft had

been warned of Mrs. Neff, but not of Winifred.

Winifred had a widowed sister in Paris, Mrs. Mather Edgcomb. With her as complicit and under her aegis Winifred attacked Senator Taft in a campaign so skillfully arranged under so many disguises that Taft was left hardly a minute to himself. All his invitations included Forbes and Mildred and young Stowe Webb.

At one of them, a night fete in Mrs. Mather Edgcomb's house in the Rue du Monceau, with musicians in Persian costume playing in the garden under the illuminated trees, Mrs. Neff and Alice were included unbeknowns to Winifred. She was aghast at the tactical mistake, and she was cut enough when Alice, hastening as usual in one direction and looking in another, ran into her.

"Oh, it's you, Alice. How are you? I didn't know you were in Paris. Followed the Senator over, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Alice. "Did you?"

"Where's your mother?"

"She's probably looking for me. I hope she doesn't find me. Have you seen Stowe?"

"Somewhere," said Winifred, with a perceptible thaw. "Does your mother know he's here?"

"If she did, should I be here?" Alice giggled, and laughter bubbled from Winifred, too. It continued with increase as Alice went on: "The Senator and I have come to a perfect understanding. He knows I don't love him, and that I do love Stowe. He gave Stowe his job as a starter to get me with. Yes, he did. My awful mother, of course, is always conspiring to leave the Senator alone with me. Sends us driving and Louvre-ing together. Well, that angel man, the Senator, just waits till mama is safely out of sight, then he notifies Stowe he's going away about his business and leaves us together."

"Oh, then the Senator's devotion for you is all for Stowe's sweet sake?" and there was a rapturous little break in Winifred's voice.

"Why, of course, isn't he an angel?"

"He is, indeed," said Winifred, with a

been warned of Mrs. Neff, but not of Winifred.

Winifred had a widowed sister in Paris, Mrs. Mather Edgcomb. With her as complicit and under her aegis Winifred attacked Senator Taft in a campaign so skillfully arranged under so many disguises that Taft was left hardly a minute to himself. All his invitations included Forbes and Mildred and young Stowe Webb.

At one of them, a night fete in Mrs. Mather Edgcomb's house in the Rue du Monceau, with musicians in Persian costume playing in the garden under the illuminated trees, Mrs. Neff and Alice were included unbeknowns to Winifred. She was aghast at the tactical mistake, and she was cut enough when Alice, hastening as usual in one direction and looking in another, ran into her.

"Oh, it's you, Alice. How are you? I didn't know you were in Paris. Followed the Senator over, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Alice. "Did you?"

"Where's your mother?"

"She's probably looking for me. I hope she doesn't find me. Have you seen Stowe?"

"Somewhere," said Winifred, with a perceptible thaw. "Does your mother know he's here?"

"If she did, should I be here?" Alice giggled, and laughter bubbled from Winifred, too. It continued with increase as Alice went on: "The Senator and I have come to a perfect understanding. He knows I don't love him, and that I do love Stowe. He gave Stowe his job as a starter to get me with. Yes, he did. My awful mother, of course, is always conspiring to leave the Senator alone with me. Sends us driving and Louvre-ing together. Well, that angel man, the Senator, just waits till mama is safely out of sight, then he notifies Stowe he's going away about his business and leaves us together."

"Oh, then the Senator's devotion for you is all for Stowe's sweet sake?" and there was a rapturous little break in Winifred's voice.

"Why, of course, isn't he an angel?"

"He is, indeed," said Winifred, with a

been warned of Mrs. Neff, but not of Winifred.

Winifred had a widowed sister in Paris, Mrs. Mather Edgcomb. With her as complicit and under her aegis Winifred attacked Senator Taft in a campaign so skillfully arranged under so many disguises that Taft was left hardly a minute to himself. All his invitations included Forbes and Mildred and young Stowe Webb.

At one of them, a night fete in Mrs. Mather Edgcomb's house in the Rue du Monceau, with musicians in Persian costume playing in the garden under the illuminated trees, Mrs. Neff and Alice were included unbeknowns to Winifred. She was aghast at the tactical mistake, and she was cut enough when Alice, hastening as usual in one direction and looking in another, ran into her.

"Oh, it's you, Alice. How are you? I didn't know you were in Paris. Followed the Senator over, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Alice. "Did you?"

"Where's your mother?"

"She's probably looking for me. I hope she doesn't find me. Have you seen Stowe?"

"Somewhere," said Winifred, with a perceptible thaw. "Does your mother know he's here?"

"If she did, should I be here?" Alice giggled, and laughter bubbled from Winifred, too. It continued with increase as Alice went on: "The Senator and I have come to a perfect understanding. He knows I don't love him, and that I do love Stowe. He gave Stowe his job as a starter to get me with. Yes, he did. My awful mother, of course, is always conspiring to leave the Senator alone with me. Sends us driving and Louvre-ing together. Well, that angel man, the Senator, just waits till mama is safely out of sight, then he notifies Stowe he's going away about his business and leaves us together."

"Oh, then the Senator's devotion for you is all for Stowe's sweet sake?" and there was a rapturous little break in Winifred's voice.

"Why, of course, isn't he an angel?"

"He is, indeed," said Winifred, with a

"So it is," said Mrs. Neff, struggling toward him through a sort of panic of completely moving groups. "How is the dear boy? Paris has swept him off his feet, eh?"

"He's the melancholiest man here—the ghost of the boulevards."

"It's too bad," said Mrs. Neff. "He was the man for Persis." She reached up his side, took his hand, and laughed into his face. He came out of a dream and stared at her foggily, then answered the warm clench of her little fingers. She said:

"And what are you staring at so hard?"

"Mrs. Enslee. He started at the name—'Mrs. Enslee'?"

"Yes, Persis. You haven't forgotten her, have you?"

"Oh, no, of course not. But she isn't here."

"Oh yes, she is, with her brand-new husband."

"Really," he said, trying to sound casual, though the warning of her nearness frightened him and put his heart to its paces.

"I'll never forgive you for not marrying her after you flirted with her so dreadfully."

"He laughed, wretchedly. 'And you say she's a Parisian?'"